DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 279 058 EA 019 151

AUTHOR Boileau, Don M.; McBath, James H.
TITLE The New Basic: Oral Communication.
INSTITUTION National School Boards Association, Alexandria, VA. Educational Policies Service.
PUB DATE Feb 87
NOTE 6p.
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
JOURNAL CIT Updating School Board Policies; v18 n2 p1-3,6 Feb 1987

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Board of Education Policy; Communication (Thought Transfer); Competence; Creative Expression; Curriculum Design; *Curriculum Development; Guidelines; Instructional Development; Instructional Improvement; Instructional Innovation; Instructional Material Evaluation; Program Development; Secondary Education; *Speech Communication; *Speech Curriculum; *Speech Instruction; *Speech Skills; Student Needs; Teacher Qualifications; *Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

School systems are increasingly following national reports' recommendations that oral communication instruction in the high school curriculum should develop students' everyday academic competencies, personal confidence, and research and employment abilities. This report discusses instructional applications of oral communication and offers course and program guidelines. Of the instructional approaches, the independent course in oral communication taught by a qualified instructor most effectively benefits large numbers and a diversity of students. This academic approach is based on traditional English essentials of composition, literature, and language fundamentals. Skills apply to a range of situations, audiences, and communication forms. For most school systems, outcome statements on the state level can assist local planning formulation. Assistance in setting up the course can come from English department members, teachers with speech communication background, and nearby school and university systems. The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) database is an invaluable resource for locating materials on teaching speech. The course should develop basic competencies in speaking and listening among all ability levels. Innovative instructional applications at four high schools are described, including cooperative learning principles and attention to critical listening. To monitor course development, school board members should follow guidelines related to: (1) articulation of rationale; (2) responsiveness to student use of the subject; (3) instruction by teachers with majors or strong minors in the subject; and (4) meeting accreditation and university entrance standards. (CJH)

ED279058

Updating SCHOOL BOARD POLICIES

Volume 18/Number 2/February 1987

A component of the Educational Policies Service of the National School Boards Association provided to NSBA Direct Affiliates and EPS subscribers

The new basic: oral communication

by Don M. Boileau
and James H. McBath

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. Floyd

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

EA 019 151

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Updating SCHOOL BOARD POLICIES

Volume 18/Number 2/February 1987

A component of the Educational Policies Service of the National School Boards Association provided to NSBA Direct Affiliates and EPS subscribers

The new basic: oral communication

by Don M. Boileau and James H. McBath

Evidence is accumulating that school systems throughout the country are giving renewed attention to oral communication instruction in the high school curriculum. The news should not come as a surprise.

In 1983, the College Board identified six subject areas, including communication skills, as critical to success in college. The report, *Academic Preparation for College*, advised that these skills will be necessary as students are called on "to express themselves aloud and to listen to and learn from discussions and lectures."

Later that year, the National Commission on Excellence in Education urged in *A Nation at Risk* that high school graduates be equipped "to listen effectively and discuss ideas intelligently." Even before, in November 1982, the National Commission on Higher Education Issues had stated flatly: "No student should be admitted to full participation in any baccalaureate degree program who has not demonstrated fundamental competence in reading, writing, speaking, mathematical techniques, and reasoning."

These same recommendations hold for students who are preparing to enter the work force after high school graduation. The Task Force on Education for Economic Growth cited speaking and listening competencies as essential abilities in tomorrow's work force in its report *Action for Excellence* (June 1983).

Don M. Boileau is director of educational services for the Speech Communication Association, Annandale, Va. James H. McBath is professor of communication arts and sciences at the University of Southern California and a member of the Pasadena Unified School District Board of Education.

EA 019 151

Our everyday experience confirms what the reports tell us. As a board member, for example, consider how your ability to communicate ideas to a large group or even one-on-one facilitates your work. If you think about the last time you spoke at a board meeting, before a local PTA group, or at a high school commencement—was it a satisfying experience or one you would not want to replicate?

Whether in business, law, medicine, sales, engineeering, teaching, or in almost all other professions, people recognize the need to communicate effectively in public and in private as speakers and listeners. Studies have shown that in adult life a person is at least three times more likely to exchange meaningful information with others by speaking than by writing.

High school itself is a communication-oriented society. Students must daily organize for written and oral work, express themselves aloud in class discussions, reports, and small group work, and listen to lectures and responses by other students. Competence in communication is a generative skill that helps unlock other learning.

Variety of approaches

In meeting the challenge of providing instruction in oral communication, three basic approaches are being used by various school systems. First, an attempt is being made to integrate oral communication instruction into the work of other classes. This approach takes advantage of opportunities for reading aloud, oral reports, group discussions, debates on selected topics, and the like.

The wider use of speaking and listening skills in courses where oral communication can be used effectively to further course goals is worthwhile and commendable. Consider, however, that oral communication *used* in a class is not the same as a class in oral communication. Similarly, math used in a class does not replace a class in math, although the former may be a valuable application. Systematic instruction by a teacher formally prepared in a subject creates the conditions for success by application of both theory and practice of the skills.

A second approach seeks to teach oral communication skills only through activities. The activities orientation typically involves students in extracurricular forensics programs; such programs sometimes incorporate coursework that students may take for credit.

Unquestionably, an active program in debate and individual speaking events can provide intensive training as well as multiple opportunities for student experience in a variety of speaking situations. Valuable as they are, however, extracurricular activities should supplement rather than supplant formal class work. Moreover, the activities approach does not reach every student; in fact, those who have the greatest need for communication education may be overlooked in an activity in which competitive excellence is the main criterion.

Most promising approach

The third approach is the most promising in terms of educational soundness and ability to benefit large numbers and a broad diversity of students. An independent course in oral communication, taught by a qualified instructor, is most likely to achieve the desired goals.

Ernest Boyer, president of The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement

continued on page 2

continued from page 1

of Teaching, advocated one such course in his book, *High School*:

> "The one-semester speech course we propose would include group discussion, formal debate, public speaking, and reading literature aloud. Again, the goal is not just effective self-expression; it also is reflective thinking. Students' oral comments must also be accompanied by careful analysis and critique by teachers."

Content

The academic approach to the study of oral communication is based firmly on the traditional English essentials of composition, literature, and language fundamentals. Many California schools are addressing each of these essentials as follows:

Composition. Students are taught to research, analyze, organize, support, and compose discourse that will serve a variety of purposes—informative, persuasive, argumentative. Similarities and differences between oral and written composition are discussed. Students learn to compose original materials for oral presentation.

Literature. Students are encouraged and motivated to read books, articles, and essays for ideas and information. In addition to traditional literary materials, they are introduced to the reading of speeches as literature. Who can deny the power of ideas expressed by Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, John F. Kennedy, or Martin Luther King?

Language fundamentals. Principles of correct grammar and appropriate usage are as readily exemplified in the preparation and criticism of oral as well as in written composition. Bad grammar can be corrected swiftly in the speaking situation, with listeners also made party to the preferred wording. Compositional strengths and weakness can be discussed to the benefit of all listeners, or the messages may be conveyed in the conventional note form if the teacher desires.

The academic approach addresses the everyday communication needs of students and provides a wide range of speaking and listening experiences. It tries to develop effective communication skills appropriate to:

- a range of situations, e.g., informal to formal, interpersonal to mass communication;
- a range of purposes, e.g., informing, learning, persuading, evaluating messages, facilitating social interaction, sharing feelings, imaginative and creative expression;
- a range of audiences, e.g., classmates, teachers, peers, employers, family, community;
- a range of communication forms, e.g., conversation, group discussion, interview, drama, debate, public speaking, oral interpretation;
- a range of speaking styles, e.g., impromptu, extemporaneous, and reading from a manuscript.

Developing the program

After deciding to develop an oral communication course, the first question is: How do we start?

When the Pasadena Unified School District recently planned a high school course in oral communication, it was a collaboration involving teachers, administrators, and a faculty member from the local community college. State curriculum guidelines were reviewed carefully as were course materials solicited from other high schools. A cadre of teachers and principals accepted an invitation to observe oral communication classes in a neighboring school system; afterwards they discussed their reactions at a meeting chaired by Pasadena's administrator for secondary instruction. Then, based on their study and observation, the Pasadena group made comprehensive recommendations for course and staff development.

Many state agencies have developed materials that provide guidance for the entire K-12 sequence; local school systems can select what is appropriate. The state education department in Illinois, for example, published "Model Learning Objectives" for the language arts. The oral communication program draws upon two of the six basic outcome statements:

- listen critically and analytically;
- use spoken language effectively in formal and in informal situations to communicate ideas and information and to ask and answer questions.

Each statement has objectives related to grades three, six, eight, and ten.

California's new "Model Curriculum Standards" provide a strong emphasis on oral communication in the English/Language Arts section. Virginia has developed in its "Standards of Learning" oral objectives at each grade level, K-12. These and other statements can assist local school systems in formulating their own plans.

Who will teach?

The second question to answer is: Where will we get the teachers?

Most high school staffs include teachers with speech majors or minors; however, they may not be teaching speech now. These hidden resources may be found in almost any academic area. Most English departments have members with the appropriate certification to teach oral communication whose present teaching loads are composed only of general English classes. Pasadena, for example, found a strong nucleus of qualified speech teachers already in the school system. Occasionally, a teacher lacking only one or two courses for certification can be encouraged to complete the requirements.

Assistance available

The third question is: Where do we get help?

The ideal place to start is with your own teachers who have background and an interest in developing speech communication. These teachers and central personnel will have leads on other resources. Also, consult with nearby school systems about their experiences in developing successful programs.

Another place to check is the language arts coordinator in the state education department for information on state standards and guidelines. In addition, speech communication faculty at a

Updating School Board Policies is published eleven times annually and provided to every board member and the policy administrator of school districts that participate in the National School Boards Association's Direct Affiliate Program or subscribe to NSBA's Educational Policies Service. EPS Staff: Dale Gaddy, director, education and management services department; Brenda Z. Greene, editor; Carol MacDougall, production coordinator; Eve Shepard, clearinghouse manager.

Information presented in EPS/NSBA publications does not necessarily reflect official NSBA viewpoints.

Copyright 1987 National School Boards Association. All Rights Reserved. Permission to reprint articles may be requested through the editor.

NSBA President
Nellie C. Weil

NSBA Executive Director
Thomas A. Shannon

Associate Executive Director
James Betchkal

Assistant Executive Director
Robert F. Lucas

local university or respected school within the state can be helpful. And the more than 1,000 articles on teaching speech contained in the ERIC document collection are an invaluable resource. The Speech Communication Association (5105 Backlick Road, Annandale, Va. 22003) also has a list of materials appropriate to K-12 programs.

Course characteristics

A good course in oral communication will foster the development of basic competencies in speaking and listening. Here are some reasonable course objectives for high school students.

To be a *competent speaker*, a person must be able to compose a message and provide ideas and information suitable to the topic, purpose, and audience. This includes:

- determining the purpose of the oral discourse;
- choosing a topic and restricting it according to the purpose and the audience;
- fulfilling the purpose by formulating a thesis statement, providing adequate support material, selecting a suitable organizational pattern, demonstrating careful choice of words, and providng effective transitions.

The *competent speaker* also must be able to transmit the message by using delivery skills suitable to the topic, purpose, and audience.

To be a *competent listener*, a person must be able to listen with literal comprehension. This includes:

- recognizing main ideas;
- identifying supporting details;
- recognizing explicit relationships among ideas;
- recalling basic ideas and details.

The *competent listener* also must listen with critical comprehension, which includes:

- attending with an open mind;
- perceiving the speaker's purpose and organization of ideas and information;
- discriminating between statements of fact and opinion;
- discriminating between emotional and logical arguments;
- detecting bias and prejudice;
- synthesizing and evaluating by drawing logical inferences and conclusions;
- recalling implications and arguments;
- recognizing discrepancies between speaker's verbal/nonverbal messages.

Course content

In examining the direction and content of a course in oral communication, consider that it should:

- be functional;
- be based on sound theory;
- appeal to students on all ability levels;
- provide opportunities for practice and criticism;
- build research skills;
- promote critical thinking ability;
- develop self-confidence;
- provide for student interaction and involvement;
- help students give oral reports, participate in group discussions, and be active in class discussions as listeners, questioners, and respondents.

Innovative applications

Sound oral communication instruction is grounded in fundamentals because communicative effectiveness begins with a knowledge of how communication works. Some schools have developed innovative ways to motivate students and impart communication skills. Several examples will suggest the diversity of emphases and applications.

1. The required course serving 400 ninth graders at Gladstone High School (Covina, Calif.) is based on cooperative learning principles. Instructors divide classes into four-person teams that are representative of the class makeup and abilities. After a class discussion of potential topics, each group decides its focus for the assignment. Following individual research, the group organizes its oral presentation to provide varying presentation opportunities for students. Says teacher Allan Eisenwinter of this application of cooperative learning, "It builds self-concept, it makes learning interesting, and it is excellent motivation."

2. In the oral communication courses at Belleville West High School, Ill., special attention is given to critical listening. Major units explore listening as a communication skill, barriers to effective listening, and techniques for developing good listening habits. Extensive use is made of audio-visual materials. Dr. Richard Hunsaker, who developed the Belleville program, notes that nearly half of an adult's communication day is spent listening more than on writing or reading combined. College students spend about 53 percent of their communication time listening.

3. Winner of a 1986 Golden Bell Award of the Californial School Boards Association was the Speechmaster's Program of the San Marcos Unified School District. During one class period per week, each student makes some type of formal presentation according to a preassigned specific role. Typical roles include: formal speakers; impromptu speakers; evaluator of formal speeches; grammarian; humorist; topic master; general evaluator; and speech master. During the class, students are actively involved in performing, evaluating, and providing constructive feedback. Videotapes are used so that students can see and hear themselves for self-evaluation.

4. The required ninth grade class at J.K. Mullen High School in Denver teaches communication skills in a framework that also reinforces the learning skills basic to other subject fields. For instance, debate develops note-taking competence, strategies for research, attention to logical analysis, and organizational skills. Outlining, grammar, and spelling are taught and practiced. Researching the class debate topic requires the preparation of 100 evidence cards from 25 different sources. Teachers in the upper English classes assume mastery of these research skills.

Board role

In monitoring the development of any course in oral communication, board members should be attentive to these guidelines:

- The rationale and purposes of the course should be clearly articulated.
- The course should be responsive to the uses that students will make of their communication knowledge and skills.
- The course should incorporate materials that deal with essential subject matter of the field.
- The course should provide students with an understanding of the various perspectives by which one can study communication.
- The course should be conducted by teachers who have college majors or strong minors in the subject field.
- The course should be supported by the library resources needed to

continued on page 6

continued from page 3

sustain day-to-day study and preparation.

- The course should make use of the learning provided by other departments, just as they use oral communication in their classrooms.
- The course should take advantage of opportunities for students to apply communication knowledge and skills in school and community settings.
- The program should include appropriate extracurricular and interscholastic activities to augment the formal course work.
- The program should meet the standards set forth by accrediting agencies and for university entrance.

NSBA
DIRECT AFFILIATE

National School Boards Association
1680 Duke Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314